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DESTINATION

Panama tourism surges with arrivals climbing 17% in 1H2026

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Panama is gaining momentum as a tourism destination, with international arrivals, hotel occupancy and meetings activity all posting solid growth during the first half of 2026.

The country welcomed 1.76 million international visitors between January and June, up 17.4% from the same period in 2025, according to figures cited by the Panama Tourism Authority. Tourism generated an estimated **\$3.5 billion** in economic impact during the six-month period.

The growth is also showing up in the hotel sector. **Occupancy reached 67.6%, a 14% year-over-year increase, based on STR data shared by the tourism authority.**

Meetings and events are adding another layer to the recovery. **Panama hosted 74 international events during the first six months of the year, attracting more than 113,900 participants.**

Those events generated about **48,000 occupied hotel rooms** and an estimated **\$91.5 million in economic impact**. A total of **110 international events have already been confirmed for 2026**, suggesting the MICE segment will remain an important source of demand.

The figures point to growth across several tourism segments rather than reliance on leisure arrivals alone, with business events, urban stays and individual travel contributing to the increase.

Turning connections into visits

Air connectivity remains central to [Panama's tourism strategy](#). **Tocumen International Airport handled 11.53 million passengers in the first half of 2026**, an increase of 15% year over year.

But the traffic mix highlights a challenge. In June, **76% of airport passengers were only connecting travelers**, underscoring Panama's role as a major regional aviation hub.

The country is therefore trying to convert more transit passengers into actual visitors through its Panama Stopover program, developed by Copa Airlines in partnership with the **Panama Tourism Authority** and PROMTUR Panamá.

The program attracted more than **132,000 participants during the first half**, up 38% from a year earlier.

A recent change could further increase its impact. **The maximum stopover period has been extended from seven to 15 days at no additional cost on the airline ticket**, giving connecting passengers considerably more time to explore Panama rather than simply spending a night or two in Panama City.

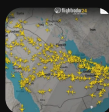
For Panama, the first-half figures suggest that connectivity is increasingly serving as a platform for broader tourism growth, rather than simply reinforcing the country's role as a transit hub.

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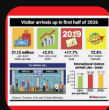
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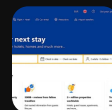
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